

A Positive Strategy for Energy Independence

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The road to American energy independence begins with defining what is contributing to the rise in energy prices - a growth in global demand, a stagnant local refinery capacity, underdeveloped local energy exploration and a continued heavy dependence on foreign oil. Temporary measures, such as a suspension of the gas tax, can be helpful right now, but we need to refocus our efforts on a long-term, strategic goal of achieving a diversified and cleaner energy infrastructure.

Supporting initiatives that utilize American ingenuity and natural resources is vital to short-term and long-term energy independence. I am proud to have joined many of my colleagues in pledging our support for legislation that will focus on rejuvenating America's energy exploration by lifting unnecessary regulations and moratoriums on drilling in the United States. Modern technology affords energy companies the ability to use environmentally friendly techniques to tap into vital oil reserves as well as untold natural gas reserves. The talking points against this type of drilling are frankly outdated, and many of their concerns have been incorporated - particularly when it comes to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The actual area slated for energy exploration in the refuge is very small in comparison to the 19-million-acre refuge. Congress designated 1.5 million acres of the refuge in 1980 for study to determine the extent of oil reserves. Actual drilling would affect only roughly 2,000 acres. While the estimated 10 billion barrels of oil from these few thousand acres is not the final answer, it is certainly part of a comprehensive strategy. Turning our backs on this reserve of oil and other potential reserves and refusing to tap into the enormous potential in natural gas exploration off-shore is simply foolish.

Taking full advantage of local oil exploration means revamping and reconstructing our refinery capacity. We have not built a new refinery in this country in more than 30 years. That is equivalent to a company that fails to update its infrastructure in three decades yet tries to compete in a complicated and constantly growing global free market. To remain competitive, we need to invest in America.

Alternative-energy sources such as biomass, nuclear and hydrogen fuel cells have the potential to revolutionize how we heat our homes, transport our food and other commerce as well as power our cars. In South Carolina alone, more than 50 percent of our electricity is generated through nuclear energy. We have proven that this clean-energy alternative is something that can be safely used and be a vital component of electricity generation in other parts of the country.

There are many arenas of innovation at our fingertips. Since there is no silver bullet, no single solution, it is unwise not to bring to bear all these resources. As long as they prove to be viable and cost-effective, we will surely be pushing America onto a stronger energy foundation.

Ultimately, the future of American competitiveness and prosperity will be built upon an innovative and sustainable energy portfolio that has conservation at its core. Conservation is not only cost-effective, it is forward-looking. Efforts such as building energy-efficient homes and businesses and purchasing hybrid vehicles should be incentivized through tax credits.

Many of us are fighting to bring commonsense, long-term and short-term solutions to the energy crisis. The American people want leadership and solutions, not just more talk and finger pointing. Rather than decry the rise in gas prices, we should focus that energy on the opportunities ahead.